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ABSTRACT

Since its inception 20 years ago, adult basic education (ABE) has been implemented successfully at the state and local levels. The statute that originally authorized ABE has proven successful largely because of three factors--its tractability, its ability to structure implementation, and its success in gaining both sovereign and media support because of its responsiveness to socioeconomic conditions. Despite its successes, however, the ABE delivery system is not without constraints or problems. For example, ABE delivery has been plagued by a lack of resources, by an inappropriate popular perception of ABE as a continuation of the regular school program, by difficulties in recruiting and retaining students, and by the necessity of abiding by various K-12 policies that must be followed not because they are relevant to ABE but because ABE is typically offered in regular school settings. In addition, changes in the administration of ABE has resulted in a loss of federal technical assistance and a loss of leadership in state and local ABE programming. On the positive side, ABE is a very cost-effective program that has resulted in an economic return rate of four to one by providing the training necessary to remove persons from welfare and place them into taxable income-generating jobs. In addition, ABE is credible, with numerous success stories to provide testimony to its true impact. (MN)

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**An Analysis of the Delivery System of
The Adult Basic Education Program**

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November 21, 1984

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The Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program, established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, provides adults with a second chance to master the basic skills necessary to function more effectively in society. ABE shows the picket fence syndrome in that power flows from the top down. The connectors (state elected officials) are relatively powerless, except for providing the 10% dollar match. ABE is an example of inclusive dependent hierarchy since the feds are in charge and use sanctions to keep state and locals in compliance. ABE appears to be a blend of the classical technocrat and instructive delegate. As a categorical program, with well defined goals, objectives, and outcomes, the policymakers have an established hierarchial command structure and, for the most part, only technical authority is delegated to the implementors. However, some discretionary administrative authority is delegated to the state agency (in writing its own state plan based on its needs). The state agency likewise, allows local educational agencies to select program staff, class hours, and locations.

Using the Mountjoy/O'Toole model, because of constraints with limited resources, the ABE program moves from the cell of straight-forward implementation to one with resistance and conflict. Using Edner's IGR model, ABE illustrates mutual accommodation since the policymakers agree on the substance.

ABE began as a redistributive policy because it allocated something of value to a large group (2 million) of have-nots, the illiterates. Over the years, however, it seems to have

taken on the characteristics of a distributive policy because it provides tangible benefits to a small group of people (this part is questionable) based on certain criteria (age and education level). Because illiteracy and unemployment have no geographic boundaries, the ABE program has received wide-spread support.

Over its 20 year history, the program has been successfully implemented at the state and local level. Three general factors (described in the implementation article by Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian) have contributed to its success: its tractability, the ability of the statute to structure implementation, and nonstatutory variables.

Tractability of Statute

1. Valid underlying theory: Numerous studies and surveys had shown a positive correlation between unemployment and the lack of education. The assumption was made in formulating the policy that since there were so many undereducated adults, they would take advantage of the opportunity to upgrade their skills.

2. Defined target population: Adult illiterates were defined according to their educational proficiency levels.

Ability of Statute to Structure Implementation

1. Clear and simple objectives: The Act clearly describes (the regulations are directive) the program's goals, objectives, activities, target population, the service delivery system (using the existing local educational agency), performance standards (pre and post standardized tests for students helps define their proficiency levels and determine outcome evaluation), and the responsibilities of implementors, such as

monitoring, to ensure compliance (intended purpose).

2. Incorporation of causal theory: Basic skills was considered one measure to correct poverty and social and educational disadvantage. Efforts had already been made (a precedent), mostly in large cities, to offer academic classes to adult immigrants. The general feeling was positive. Furthermore, funds were included for staff development. Teachers received specialized training, including counseling, so they could help solve the special problems of adults which might adversely affect their educational achievement.

3. Hierarchical integration: Administrative clearance/veto points were established at two levels only: the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Division of Adult Education (ED), which administers the program at the federal level and approves state plans and the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Educational Services, Adult and Community Section (ODE), which administers the program at the state level and approves local applications.

The intent of the law is translated and conveyed to the implementors at the state level through federal regulations, memos from ED interpreting vague sections of the regulations, through regional conferences throughout the United States, and through state directors meetings. ODE conveys its message to the locals through the dissemination of federal regulations, written memos, auditors circulars, and state directors meetings.

The Act requires ODE to develop a three-year state plan, approved by ED, which serves as the legal basis by which the ODE

qualifies to participate in and receive funds for the program. The state plan includes assurances and provisions for program requirements and management needs. Local proposals must include a plan for administration, supervision, and expenditures.

The allocation of funds is determined by a Congressional formula (the number of persons 16 or over without a high school diploma, available from census data), and forward funded to allow planning time. Carryover is permitted. Allocation occurs in spring when the Director of Adult Education in ED sends a letter to ODE indicating their state allotment for the upcoming year. In June the state director in ODE sends a letter to the local directors announcing their annual allocation (based on country figures). ODE also uses country figures to determine the 10% match of state funds (a separate allocation). Funds are sent to locals upon approval of their projects.

Each year an Annual Performance Report (responding to measurable outcomes) and a Financial Status Report must be submitted by ODE to ED. ED can (and has) employ(ed) sanctions (withholding or delaying money) if these reports are late or if there are problems. ODE can (and has) withhold (withheld) or delay(ed) money if a local project is late, has problems or if local attendance and performance reports are late.

4. Commitment by implementors: One of the state implementors enhanced ABE's success. As both the state ABE director and the legislative liaison for ODE he was involved in both formulating and implementing the policy. He encouraged local commitment to the program by stressing its goal of helping the

undereducated adult and applauded locals for their efforts. Compliance as well as success were almost automatic. The two ABE program consultants have a high degree of technical skills: practical experience, an adult education background, and a real commitment to ABE (more than 8 years each in ABE --they are not civil service). They provide excellent technical assistance to the locals, have a good rapport with them, encourage flexible planning, and, if necessary, use coercion to create cooperative agreements between schools and agencies to make programs cost-effective and accountable.

At the beginning, there was a missionary spirit that prevailed at the local level. This commitment continues. With decreased funds, local school boards have picked up some of the program's administrative and utility costs so that money can be focused on direct instruction. They have also formed partnerships with local service and employment agencies to foster cooperation, coordination, and to make it cost-effective.

5. Other actors/participants: In the late 70s participatory planning became a requirement in the development of the state plan in order to encourage outreach activities and cooperation and coordination with other state and local agencies. ODE consultants conduct annual reviews of the local programs to encourage performance achievement and ensure compliance.

Nonstatutory variables

1. Socioeconomic conditions: Over the years the target population of adult illiterates has not decreased. The changing job market has contributed to unemployment as well as demands

for new skills while there has been an increasing population of immigrants and high school dropouts. Consequently, demand for the program remains high and more are served each year.

2. Media attention/public and constituency support: The recent report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education focused its attention on the problem of illiteracy. Other studies continue to show the high correlation between illiteracy and unemployment, poverty, and high welfare costs. Because adult illiterates are not a vocal constituency (they have been termed prisoners of silence), it has often been left to the professionals to speak for their clients.

3. Sovereign support: The legislative liaison at ODE (and a former ABE state director) continues to maintain a strong interest in the program by testifying in support of the program and relaying the successes of the program to state and federal policymakers. At the federal level the program has received its strongest support from Democrats since ABE relates to the Democratic party platform of using education as a means of becoming productive citizens. The late Rep. Carl Perkins, chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, could be called a fixer (according to Eugene Bardach) due to his strong support and commitment. President Reagan and his administration have shown little support, marked by his efforts to turn the categorical program into a block grant and his recommendation to use volunteers (rather than additional funds) as a means to supplement regular ABE teachers.

Constraints/Problems of Implementation/Slippage

1. Lack of resources: Implementors at all levels stated that lack of resources (\$100 million a year) has clearly affected the program and limited its success. Lack of resources has affected teacher quality (many are regular classroom teachers who also teach ABE), has restricted class size, reduced the hours of instruction, number of teachers and availability of resource materials. ODE limits costs for administration, coordination, and instruction in an attempt to serve more students. The 10% setaside for staff development has become burdensome for locals who would prefer to spend more money for direct instructional services.

2. Role perception: Because of its delivery system, some people tend to see ABE as a continuum of the regular school program. This Kindergarten-12 mentality is too regimented and not appropriate for ABE which uses flexible hours, settings and instructional methods to encourage adult learning.

3. Recruitment and retention of students: Recruiting illiterate adults is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive since conventional methods (printed materials) aren't effective. Retaining students is difficult since many of them are used to failure, don't persevere, or have personal problems (poverty, illness, lack of child care and transportation). When their basic needs have not been met, education is not a priority.

4. School setting: Most classes held in regular schools tend to follow the K-12 policies (such as closing for vacation) and must comply with teacher contracts, unions, etc.

5. State and federal leadership: Two years ago ODE

reorganized, combining all adult programs into one section headed by a new person. Unfortunately, the change appears to have weakened the state's leadership role and effectiveness as the new director (a conserver, according to Downs) has no experience in adult education, has responsibilities in other areas which conflict with ABE, and appears to discourage staff socialization. At the federal level, since the Reagan Administration took office, paperwork has been reduced. The tradeoff is that ED has not provided any technical assistance or leadership role (many adult educators in ED have retired), nor have they conducted any program reviews. ED has pushed its adult literacy initiative which focuses on the use of volunteers rather than additional ABE dollars.

Conclusions

The goals of this categorical program have been clearly accomplished within the limited resources. In fact, the program is very cost-effective. This efficient use of resources is because locals are given discretion in designing activities to achieve outputs based on the stated performance standards. The money saved from removing people from public assistance and the taxable income generated by the newly employed has resulted in an economic return rate of 4-to-1. The simplicity of ABE's goals, delivery system, and target population; the disposition of implementors, and its single purpose, literacy, has helped it achieve its goals. In addition, the program is credible. Many students see it as a savior. Their success stories are testimony as to the true impact of program.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ABE PROGRAM

Understanding the organizational structure of the ABE program helps understand its implementation procedures.

Teachers: At the bottom of the structure are teachers. They evaluate students, place them, instruct and counsel them, and recruit new students. They report to the local coordinator.

Local Coordinator: He/she is hired by the local educational agency and is responsible for establishing and operating a state-approved local or country program, enforcing regulations from the state director, budgeting, collecting the needs of the district, and submitting the required attendance, performance, and fiscal reports to the state agency.

State Director: He is the liaison between all state ABE programs and the Director of the Adult Education Division (Paul Delker) in the U.S. Department of Education (ED). He is responsible for developing and implementing the three-year state plan and approving local applications as well as submitting the annual performance and financial status report to ED. The performance report is very detailed and includes the number of participants by race, ethnic group, age and sex; participant progress; the number of participants and number of daytime and evening classes by type of location; the number of paid personnel, and their amount of training; and the state program impact data. In the Ohio Department of Education, the state director reports to the Director of the Division of Educational Services, who reports to the Assistant Superintendent, State Superintendent, and State Board of Education.

National Director: The Director in ED is responsible for approving the state plans and performance and fiscal reports. He reports to the Secretary of Education, who reports to the President, Congress, Office of Management and Budget, or the National Advisory Council on Adult Education, depending on the nature of the report.

The National Advisory Council on Adult Education: This 15-member council, appointed by the President, provides advice on the preparation of regulations, oversees administration and effectiveness of the program, and makes annual reports to the President. The National Institute of Education is authorized to evaluate and validate the products of federal and state level research and staff development activities (Section 310 of Act). The National Center for Education Statistics is responsible for collecting data on ABE to improve its quality. The Education Commission of the States in September of 1978 prepared a background paper on state policies, priorities and issues in Lifelong Learning (which included the ABE program).

Appropriations History for the Adult Education Act

(Dollars in millions)

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Budget Request</u>	<u>House Rec.</u>	<u>Senate Rec.</u>	<u>Appropriation</u>	<u>Public Law</u>
1985	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	98-473
1984*	--	\$100	\$100	\$100	98-139
1983*	--	--	--	\$ 95	97-377 (CR)
1982**	--	--	--	\$ 86.4	97-92 (CR)
1981***	\$122	--	--	\$100	96-536 (CR)
1980	\$90.75	--	--	\$122	96-123 (CR)

* President Reagan proposed a Vocational and Adult Education Block Grant with combined funding of \$500 million for Fiscal years 1984 and 1983. In 1983 the Reagan budget recommended that the Department of Education's activities be transfered to a Foundation for Education Assistance. No formal proposal was ever submitted to Congress.

** President Reagan proposed a 25% reduction from the FY 83 level through rescissions (an action which cancels appropriations not yet spent) and proposed funding Vocational and Adult Education as a block grant.

*** President Reagan based his FY 80 budget request on the appropriation level during the Carter Administration. In late spring Reagan proposed rescissions of \$30 million for Adult Education; Congress approved rescissions of \$20 million. The FY 81 level included an emergency special appropriation of \$22 million for Cuban, Haitian, and Indochinese Refugees; the state grant was \$100 million.

In the 98th session of Congress, a regular Labor-HHS-Education bill was passed by Congress. This was unusual as for the past five years, education programs operated under a continuing resolution (CR). Debates over funding of abortion were often issues of conflict for the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. In addition, passing the first budget resolution, setting budget ceilings, (the first step in the budget process) seemed to be so difficult and time-consuming that Congress rarely began the appropriations process until early summer. After their recesses for summer vacation and the Labor Day holiday, Congress found themselves faced with an October 1 deadline, the start of a new fiscal year. They opted for the easy way out, passing temporary appropriations measures, CRs.

Funding for the ABE program has fluctuated over the years because of different philosophies by a Democratic and then Republican President. President Carter strongly supported education and recommended increases in funding of about 5

percent a year; an incremental strategy, resulting in an incremental outcome. However, President Reagan recommended that fundamental changes be made in the program. In FY81 he recommended a \$30 million cut (about a 25% reduction), in FY82 a 25% reduction, and in FY83 about a 10% reduction -- a fundamental change with a fundamental outcome in FY82 and FY83. In the process, Reagan popularized the term rescissions. In addition, he employed a fundamental strategy in recommending that two categorical programs: Vocational and Adult Education, be combined into a block grant and funded at \$500 million (in FY82 their combined total was almost \$900 million), resulting in an incremental outcome as the Department of Education was not abolished.

Currently, funds flow from ED to ODE and then to the local educational agencies (based on the number of persons, 16 years or older, without a high school diploma). Nonprofit agencies can contract with the locals to provide ABE classes. The law requires that 5% of the state grant be used for state administrative expense; 10 % for staff development; up to 20% for adult secondary programs; up to 20% for institutionalized adults. Special emphasis is placed on serving adults who are least educated and most in need (as part of basic grant).

In 1981, as part of the first budget resolution (resulting in budget reconciliation), President Reagan proposed reduced authorization levels for most education programs. As a result of his fundamental strategy, a fundamental outcome was achieved. ABE's authorization was reduced from \$290 million to \$140 million. Although funds have never been appropriated over \$122 million, it still restricts the program's ability to grow. As the deficit remains high, neither the appropriations nor authorizations levels will likely be increased.

Note: CR means Continuing Resolution

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